



Sound and Sea Technology Edmonds, Washington

From its Edmonds, Washington base of operations, defense contractor Sound and Sea Technology directs operations around the world. The home-based company specializes in project planning and management of the marine engineering aspects of commercial and government operations.

Judith and Dallas Meggitt formed Sound and Sea Technology in March 1999 when they were both 56. Judith Meggitt had been laid off from Northrop in Southern California; and Dallas was given a choice of moving to Rhode Island or quitting when his employer, Raytheon, was bought out. The Meggitts decided to move to Washington State and run their own company from their home.

Dallas's 30 years of experience in undersea systems installation combined with Judith's 25 years of corporate management experience make them a formidable team. Judith is president and CEO. Together, they have put project management, security clearance, cost accounting, reporting, and administration systems in place to serve their government and commercial customers.

Sound and Sea Technology's first project was a \$9,000 contract to design and set up a system to monitor communications cables running through the Olympic Marine Sanctuary off the Washington coast to ensure the cables were not damaging the environment. Since then Sound and Sea has contributed to more than two dozen successful projects involving design and installation of military and commercial undersea cable systems, acoustic trials of advanced marine equipment, remote sensor surveys of the seafloor, development of cable landing sites, and related work. SST has operations in Edmonds, Washington and Ventura, California.

In April 2001, the Meggitts contacted Michael Franz, a counselor with the Seattle Small Business Development Center (SBDC), for business assistance. SBDC is partly funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). SBDCs are located throughout Washington. SBDC counselors are experienced business owners and managers who provide confidential management and technical business assistance – at no cost.

Franz assisted the Meggitts with many aspects of their business, including marketing; federal and state minority certifications; the merits and disadvantages of forming a limited liability corporation or Subchapter S Corporation; cash flow; reviewing and preparing a pricing/overhead allocation spreadsheet. "Every time we had a question we would call Michael," said Dallas. "If he didn't have the answer right away, he would research it and get back to us."

Franz also referred them to John Tample of the Snohomish Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC). The PTAC is a national program established by Congress and funded by the Department of Defense. PTACs help small businesses understand and participate in the federal bidding process. The program has operated in conjunction with the Snohomish County Economic Development Council for more than 12 years. Tample also meets clients at the SBA Seattle District Office's Business Information Center in downtown Seattle.

In July 2001 SST was awarded a \$13.5 million five-year contract to plan and implement elements of an undersea warfare and detection system for the U.S. Navy. To meet the broad scope of the contract, Sound and Sea assembled a team of other ocean engineering firms. The company beat out several competitors, including a Fortune 500 company. The contract involves project planning, concept definition, underwater surveys, seafloor mapping and imaging, environmental assessments, and support for installation of Navy systems. Among the projects supported by this contract are the Advanced Deployable System (ADS), a next-generation undersea surveillance system; an undersea acoustic system for monitoring compliance with the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty; installation of an experimental acoustic system off the East Coast of the U.S.; and experimental cable system installations at various locations.

"Competing with very large corporations on a business level and for government procurement contracts is not for the timid," says Dallas. He believes the biggest challenge, however, is keeping customers satisfied by exceeding their expectations. Dallas said it's important to study customers' personalities and give them what they want. "Take time to understand your customers," Dallas advises.

The company's name has a double meaning. The "Sound" in Sound and Sea Technology refers to acoustics. It also stands for Puget Sound. The Meggitts also carefully selected their company's logo. They believe a logo is an important part of a business because it represents the company's image. Inspiration for SST's logo comes from a compass Dallas' father had on a wall in his home, and from an old nautical print they saw in Pt. Townsend, Washington.

For a couple who never considered owning a small business, the Meggitts are an inspiration to small business owners everywhere. Judith Meggitt touts the advantages of being a home-based business. "Being able to work 24-7 and not having to commute contributes significantly to our productivity," said Judith. "For us it also helps even out time zone issues."

Future plans for the company? "We see ourselves as having a few choices," said Dallas. "Our company can grow, shrink, or die. And we don't want to do the last two."